

William Parsons House  
Northampton  
Hampshire County  
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-188

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DATA SHEETS  
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Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
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Herbert P. Luce  
West Trail - Tokeneke  
Darien, Conn.

April 12, 1940

Mr. Frank C. Brown  
141 Milk Street  
Boston, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Brown:

I have your letter of April 4, regarding the old Parsons House, which I removed in 1937 from Northampton to Darien.

The house was built in 1754 by Lt. William Parsons.

I know that it is sometimes difficult to find out exactly the name of the builder of an old house, and particularly to get the exact year of its construction. I was fortunate in this case in getting hold of information which enabled me to date it accurately.

After purchasing the house, I was interested in the pedigree or genealogy; and being a lawyer, spent several days in the Hampshire County Clerk's Office in Northampton, running the chain of title through the old deeds of conveyance, wills, etc.

I won't give you all the supporting data, but just the facts concerning the record of ownership.

William Parsons was the son of Capt. John Parsons, and a grandson of Cornet Joseph Parsons, one of the first settlers of Northampton. Any Parsons genealogy will substantiate this. Joseph owned considerable real estate in Northampton; and in 1684, divided it among several sons, including John who, in 1705, sold his plot to a nephew Noah.

John then removed about 1705, to the tract of land subsequently known as the homestead plot, on which my house stood. He built a small dwelling which later on became the kitchen or the rear addition to the large new dwelling built by his son in 1754, and which I purchased.

Capt. John Parsons died in 1728, leaving a will which is recorded on file in the Hampshire County Probate Records, and by this will bequeathed to his son William the dwelling house and barn in which he lived and "all the homelott property thereto belonging."

Lt. William Parsons lived in the house until 1754, when he built the new house. He died in 1768, and his original will is also on file in the Hampshire County Probate Records. He left the property to his son Samuel Parsons, who sold it in 1788 to Ebenezer Lane. This deed is in the Hampshire County Deed Registry. Thereafter title descended through various owners.

In 1823, Roswell Hubbard purchased the property. He lived there until 1854, and thereafter his son John W. Hubbard continued to reside there until 1902. This was an eighty-year tenure by the Hubbards, and consequently the house became known generally around Northampton as the Hubbard House.

Between 1902 and 1935 when I purchased it, it went through various ownerships.

Therefore it is a matter of official record that this property was owned by Lt. William Parsons from the death of his father Capt. John, in 1728, until his own death in 1768.

Now as to the date of the erection of the house, it is usually possible to identify by architectural features the particular quarter of the century in which the house was erected, and I had it in mind as having been erected somewhere between 1740 and 1760 or 1770. I wanted to try to find the exact construction date if possible, and in reading one or two Parsons genealogies, I found reference to certain important manuscripts consulted by genealogists and historians, in the possession of Forbes Library, Northampton.

These manuscripts consist of several volumes compiled by a local historian of about 150 years ago, named Sylvester Judd. He noted down from day to day genealogical and other historical facts, and the manuscripts are a mine of information and should be published.

At any rate, I felt that I might find some reference to the house, and dug through the volumes and finally found a specific statement, reading as follows:

"William Parsons. In 1754 he and his son Samuel built the house (gambrel roof) in which Mr. Lane (now Mr. Hubbard) lived - one of the largest in the town - underpinning brought from Springfield - the old house in which Capt. John and Wm. Parsons had lived was put behind as a kitchen etc. Woods formerly toward river - fear of Indians gave them trouble."

This statement is to me sufficient proof of the year of construction. It was reasonable to find some comment on this house because it was a superior type of dwelling. In fact, the type is commented on by another historian, Solomon Clark, who, in 1881, published a book entitled "Historicals, Antiquities and Graduates of

Northampton." On Page 81, he states, "The next style of architecture, perhaps the third introduced, was the gambrel roof, having a capacity sufficient for families of the largest size. At the end of the last century (by 1799) as many as seven had been erected."

There is one particularly fine room in the house, on the second floor, which was obviously the bedroom of Lt. William Parsons. In a codicil to his will, he specifically reserves its use to his unmarried daughter Margaret by a bequest reading, "And do now further bequeath to my daughter Margaret the use and improvement of my north chamber in the front of my House."

There is also a very good shell dome cupboard which had been removed from the house in about 1895 by a collector, and which through good fortune, I was able to trace and regain from the hands of one of his heirs, for incorporation in the house when it was rebuilt.

I think that so far as your records are concerned, it is in order for you to change them so as to read that the house was built by Lt. William Parsons in the year 1754.

With kind regards, I am

Very truly yours,

/s/ Herbert P. Luce

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"Regarding Mr. Luce's statement that the title of this survey should be changed, this does not seem practicable to us. In future editions of the Catalog, however, the name Lieutenant William Parsons House might be inserted in parentheses."

May 9, 1940

/s/ Thos. C. Vint,  
Chief of Planning  
Department of the Interior